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Inclusive Planning Process for Space and Services at Kyoto University Library

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Abstract:

This paper introduces the inclusive planning process for space and services at the Kyoto University Library since 2013. Kyoto University Library is the main library within the Kyoto University Library Network, which consists of over 50 libraries around the campus. In 2013, the Kyoto University Library conducted a project to design the first “Learning Commons” space on campus with various stakeholders, including librarians, faculty members, and students in a collaboration across different backgrounds. The project culminated in the award winning¹ design of the “Learning Commons” in Kyoto University Library. The concept of “Learning Commons” was first introduced to Japanese academic libraries in 2006 (加藤・小山 2012 : 3). However, in case of Kyoto University, it was the first “Learning Commons” on campus, therefore, needed to start from the long discussion of defining the characteristics of the space itself. The design process was highly inclusive of all stakeholders. Since then, Kyoto University Library has been undertaking an inclusive planning process for both space and services through the corroborative work among librarians, faculty members and students. From the experience of Kyoto University Library, one can say that the inclusive process is the key when designing the inclusive space and services.

1. Introduction

With the progress of information technology in the academic libraries since 1980s, academic libraries has been going through drastic changes, not only in collection development and user services but the use of space as well. In the United States, one of the popular models to incorporate these changes was the implementation of “Information Commons” to the academic libraries. “Information Commons” was the

¹ Namely The Japan Design Space Association Students Award in 2014 [URL: http://www.dsa.or.jp/des/2014/tokubetu/2014_en.html] and JCD International Design Awards 2014 Best 100 [URL: http://www.jcd.or.jp/designaward_2014/best100.html].

space where reference librarians in collaboration with media specialists, IT support staff, and other information related specialists and led to the revitalizing the academic libraries (Beagle 2009, 2011). By mid 1990s, “Information Commons” successfully repositioned academic libraries as the connecting point of various types of library resources including digital resources and students (Beagle 2009:26). It is around the same period that both librarians and educators proposed a comprehensive model of information literacy which was formalized as the Educational Testing Service which is consisted of various information skills such as accessing, managing, integration, evaluating, and creating (Beagle 2009: 16-17). This new commitment of librarians to comprehensive information literacy training also contributed to the development of “Information Commons” to “Learning Commons” (Beagle 2009: 17) .

In the case of Japanese academic libraries, a similar trend began in the late 1990s with the introduction of the Internet. By the 2000s the emergence of E-journals changed users’ information seeking behavior in Japanese academic settings. At the same time, the norms of higher education became the public concern because of three social factors, namely, globalization, population decrease, and the impact of disaster in 2011. The debate over the changing norms of higher education resulted as the strong push to the implementation of “active learning” instruction model in higher education². “Active learning” is the model of instruction that focuses on the learner’s participation in the process of learning. Although, to some extent, the “active learning” instruction model was already introduced in practice in 1990s in Japanese higher educations, it is in the 2000s that both the term and the practice were widely promoted in the process of seeking new norms of higher education (溝上 2014:3-6, 29-42). In addition, it is also important to note that “active learning” is tightly connected to the development of students’ information and knowledge literacy in the era of the “searching based knowledge society” (溝上 2014: 57-59).

In addition to these changes underwent in both academic libraries and educational schemes in Japanese higher education, the shift of library resources from paper to digital format draw the demand for information literacy as one of the goals of “active learning” began to affect significantly on the role of academic libraries and librarians

² See for example Japanese Central Education Council’s report on August 28, 2012. 中央教育審議会『新たな未来を築くための大学教育の質的転換に向けて－生涯学び続け、主体的に考える力を育成する大学へ－（答申）』（2012年8月28日）

in Japan in 2000s. Similar to cases in the United States, these changes eventually led to the reconsideration of the use of space in academic libraries.

The concept of “Learning Commons” was first introduced to Japanese academic libraries in 2006 (加藤・小山 2012 : 3). By now, the “Learning Commons” is widely recognized as part of new service that academic libraries could offer in coordination with the implementation of “active learning” in higher education in Japan. In addition to the implementation of the “Learning Commons” in the libraries, some universities even established “Learning Commons” as an independent campus facility outside of libraries. Other universities even applied the concept of “Learning Commons” to campus wide while there are “Learning Commons” in the libraries, too³.

While the implementation of “Learning Commons” became very popular, in the case of Kyoto University, there were no initiatives taken towards the establishment of the “Learning Commons” taken till 2012. As a result, this late start allowed the Kyoto University Library to form unique team consisted of various stakeholders on campus toward the establishment of the award winning design of “Learning Commons.”

2. Case Study from the Kyoto University Library

Kyoto University Library is the main library within the Kyoto University Library Network, consisting of over 50 libraries around the campus. In 2013, the Kyoto University Library conducted a project to design a “Learning Commons” space with various stakeholders such as librarians, faculty members, and students with different background. The result of the project was concluded as the award winning design of the “Learning Commons” in Kyoto University Library. The following is summary of the process of designing.

2.1 Pre-discussions over the space use of the library

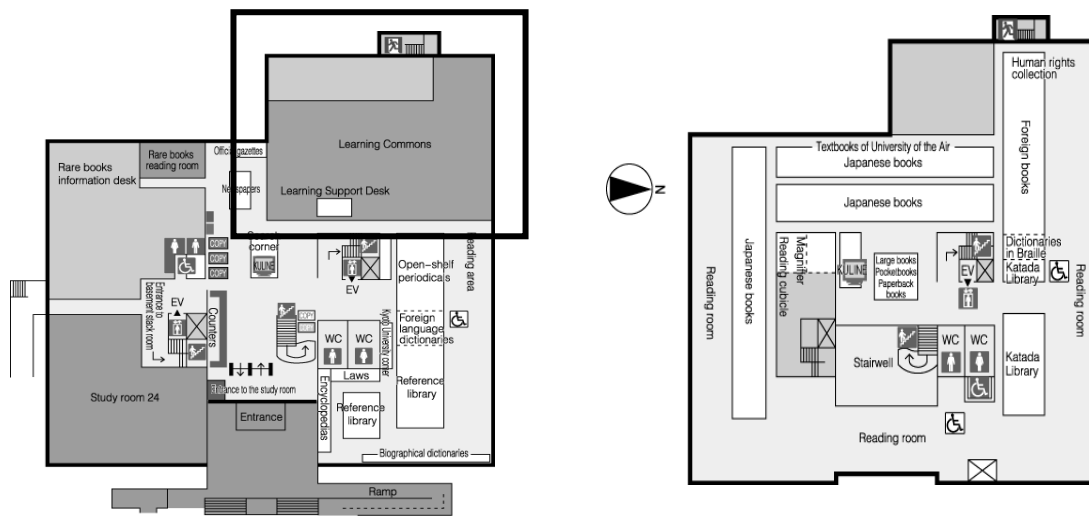
Between August 2012 to November 2012, prior to the designing of the “Learning Commons,” a working group was set by librarians and the author began discussing the new uses of library space to serve various type of users in addition to integrating the concept of “active learning” to the library space. The discussion began with the question whether or not there is a demand for “Learning Commons” in Kyoto University. If yes, why and where in the library, with what kind of service?

³ For example, Osaka University and Ritsumeikan University Ibaraki campus applied the concept of “Learning Commons” to campus wide.

At the end of four month discussion within the library, the group drafted a proposal for renovation which included the followings:

- Establish “Learning Commons” space to facilitate the student’s “active learning” by providing a space for discussion
- Locate the “Learning Commons” at the first floor to increase the accessibility of users.
- Locate the “Learning Commons” at the first floor to be managed by the reference librarians at the reference desk.
- Separate the “Learning Commons” from the general reading area by the glass walls so that the users in general reading area would not be disturbed.
- Place Multi-lingual graduate student assistants in the “Learning Commons” in order to support and find potential needs of undergraduate users.
- Establish a “Silent Area” to serve the needs of those users who prefer non-PC and silent study environment.

Based on this recommendation, Kyoto University Library applied for the internal funding for renovation. Fortunately, funding for the renovation was allocated for the FY 2013 and the library committee members agreed to seek the possibility of an inclusive design process for the “Learning Commons.”



<1st Floor. Learning Commons replace
the card catalogs>

<2st Floor>



<3rd Floor: Silent Area as New Space>

2.2. Inclusive design project for “Learning Commons”

As mentioned above, “Learning Commons” were introduced in many universities after the concept was introduced in 2006. When we surveyed the layout and setting of “Learning Commons” in various universities in Japan we noticed that most of them looked alike with the same type of chairs, tables, whiteboards, etc., even though each academic library serves different types of faculty and student body. There were

only a few university libraries which reflected students' comments to the design and utility of the space when we inquired in 2013. Considering the intention of installing the "Learning Commons" as the place for active learning, we decided to apply for a collaborative research scheme offered by the Contents Production Team at the Academic Center for Computing and Media Studies of Kyoto University. Although there was no question about the position of the library as the institute to provide support for both education and research, there have been only a few initiatives taken to involve the stakeholders outside of the library when it comes to the space use.

The inclusive design project went through following phases before it reached implementation.

Phase 1: Making Wish List for the "Learning Commons" for Kyoto University Library

The first step of the project began as a collaboration between the members of designers from the Contents Production Team and librarians and the author, from the Kyoto University Library. This phase involved long discussions in order share the image of the "Learning Commons" which would fit the needs from both students and faculty of Kyoto University. In other words, it was the process of making a wish list for the new space, using a language which can be understood by stakeholders outside of the library.

Examples of the questions discussed during this phase are as follows:

- Who is the target audience?
- What are the behavioral patterns of the target audience?
- What kind of activities do we expect to happen?
- How to facilitate the active learning?
- What kind of activities do we wish NOT to happen?
- How to implement the messages from the library to the design of the space without using signs

Phase 2: Sharing Concepts and Themes

In the second phase, we opened the discussion to the stakeholders outside of the library such as the faculty members of various disciplines and students. In addition to the students and faculty members from education and library, related disciplines we also had a chance to collaborate with a course offered on the designing learning environment by the newly established Collaborative Graduate Program in Design at

Kyoto University. As a result of the discussions with these various stakeholders, we came up with a new list which should communicate our messages through the designing of the space such as:

- The Learning Commons as a place of acquiring new knowledge
- Lead the users to act ethically
- Connection with the traditional functions of the library and library resources

Among the students participating in these discussions, two students from the graduate program of architecture⁴ showed strong intention to commit themselves to the design process itself. In November 2013, the core members of the project with these two students, as well as one of their instructors who was a professional architect, had intensive meetings every week in order to come up with the best design that represents both ideas from the librarians and inputs from external stakeholders. At the end of phase three, three models were presented by graduate students of architecture to the team members.



<Discussions in Class>



<Discussions over the models>

Phase three: Implementation of the New Design

Among the three designs presented by the graduate students, the library committee, as the official body in library management, decided on the design that represents the concept of learning commons as a new learning space in Kyoto University, yet shows the continuity with the traditional functions and resources of the library.

⁴ These two students namely Hiroto Ota and Takuya Kitamura have been working as a unit called “brouters” in various architectural project. See also their website [URL: <http://brouters.net/>].

After the design was selected and the renovation undertaken, the volunteer group of librarians and designers decided on the logo of the “Learning Commons”, while the core collaborative research project members moved on the selection process of the furniture.



<Kyoto University Library Learning Commons>



<The Logo>



<Lecture at the Learning Commons>

Phase Four: The Evaluation of the Space Use

The “Learning Commons” finally opened in April 2014 and it has been used by both faculty and students in various ways of learning. Since it was the first project to be intensively inclusive at the Kyoto University Library, in September 2014, we set up the open forum to evaluate the “Learning Commons” and to discuss its development

in the future. This Forum was joined by both the members of the teams who worked towards the implementation of the “Learning Commons” and the users, such as the students, faculty, and professional on campus.

It was an event which represented the Kyoto University Library “Learning Commons” as the outcome of collaborative project to facilitate further collaboration.



<Open forum for the evaluation>

One of the ideas presented by this forum is to set up a volunteer group of students who can plan and implement new services and ideas with the library.

As a result, Kyoto University Library succeeded in further renovation in the library in an audiovisual space called “Media Commons”, and a study room that are open 24 hours, as well as various events and redoing the users map with the collaboration of a student volunteer group.



<Renovated Media Commons>

3. Conclusion: New Tradition of Inclusive Space and Service Design in Kyoto University

In this paper, the inclusive design for both space of the service of the Kyoto University Library were presented in detail. This first started with the designing of “Learning Commons” in 2013 continues now in designing both space and services in the library. Though the Kyoto University Library is a late-comer in terms of implementation of the “Learning Commons” in the library, it provided an opportunity to reconsider the function and services which are unique in each academic library. In addition, from the experience of Kyoto University Library, one can say that the inclusive process is the key when designing the inclusive space and services.

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